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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT VENETIAAN'S VISIT TO THE SPECIAL SUMMIT
OF THE AMERICAS GARNERS LOCAL ATTENTION

REFS: 03 PARAMARIBO 735

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY.

1. (U) THE VISIT OF PRESIDENT RONALD VENETIAAN AND OTHER SURINAMESE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, INCLUDING MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY MICHAEL JONG TJEN FA, TO THE SPECIAL SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS IN MONTEREY, MEXICO, RECEIVED MUCH PRESS ATTENTION IN SURINAME. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, UPON HIS RETURN FROM MEXICO, PRESIDENT VENETIAAN MADE THE FOLLOWING POINTS:

- SUMMIT TALKS WERE "DIFFICULT" AS COUNTRIES WITH SMALL ECONOMIES LIKE SURINAME WERE UNSUCCESSFUL IN THEIR BID TO POSTPONE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FREE TRADE AREA OF THE AMERICAS (FTAA).
- THE GENERAL PUBLIC IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE IS LOSING FAITH IN DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS BECAUSE THE PROMISE OF DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ECONOMIC REFORMS AND FREE TRADE HAS NOT MATERIALIZED.
- POLITICAL LEADERS NEED TO EFFECTIVELY HARNESS THE HEMISPHERE'S MULTI-CULTURAL POPULATIONS TO PROMOTE MUTUAL RESPECT AND INTERESTS.

2. (U) ABSENT IN VENETIAAN'S COMMENTS WERE CONCERNS VOICED JUST PRIOR TO VENETIAAN'S DEPARTURE BY FOREIGN MINISTER MARIE LEVENS, WHO DID NOT TRAVEL TO MEXICO DUE TO BACK PROBLEMS, THAT THE UNITED STATES' PREOCCUPATION WITH THE WAR AGAINST TERRORISM AND OTHER SECURITY INTERESTS MAY INTERFERE WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FTAA AND THE CARIBBEAN SINGLE MARKET ECONOMY.

3. (U) ON A MORE CONCRETE NOTE, VENETIAAN DECLARED THAT SURINAME HAD TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF THE SUMMIT'S MARGINS TO FORWARD ITS AGENDA ON TWO KEY FRONTS: RICE EXPORTS TO MERCOSUR AND THE CANDIDACY OF A ONE-TIME SURINAMESE DIPLOMAT FOR A KEY ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS) POSITION. DETERMINED TO SECURE MARKETS FOR SURINAME'S MOST IMPORTANT AGRICULTURAL PRODUCT (RICE), GOS OFFICIALS SOUGHT THE SUPPORT OF THEIR URUGUAYAN COUNTERPARTS FOR SURINAMESE RICE EXPORTS TO BRAZIL AND OTHER MERCOSUR COUNTRIES. THEY ALSO LOBBIED VARIOUS REPRESENTATIVES FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF ALBERT RAMDIN, CURRENTLY AN ADVISOR TO OAS HEAD CESAR GAVIRIA, TO THE POSITION OF OAS ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL. (SEE REFTTEL.)

4. (SBU) MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AMERICAS DEPARTMENT HEAD TERENCE CRAIG (PLEASE PROTECT) INDICATED TO THE EMBASSY THAT CARICOM MEMBERS HAVE INFORMALLY AGREED TO ENDORSE RAMDIN'S CANDIDACY AND THAT THIS POSITION WILL BE MADE OFFICIAL DURING A CARICOM COUNCIL OF FOREIGN AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS IN MAY. CRAIG ADDED THAT AS FAR AS SURINAME-UNITED STATES RELATIONS ARE CONCERNED, HIS GOVERNMENT LOOKS FORWARD TO TAPPING INTO PRESIDENT BUSH'S FIVE-YEAR 15 BILLION USD HIV/AIDS EMERGENCY RELIEF PLAN.

5. (U) COMMENT. FOR ISOLATED SURINAME, THE SUMMIT PROVIDED A RARE OPPORTUNITY FOR PRESIDENT VENETIAAN TO RUB ELBOWS WITH OTHER POLITICAL LEADERS IN THE AMERICAS. IT ALSO RESULTED IN AN EXCELLENT PHOTO OP. SEVERAL LOCAL DAILIES PROMINENTLY DISPLAYED ON THEIR FRONT PAGES THE SUMMIT'S FAMILY PHOTO, WHICH FEATURED VENETIAAN PLACED BEHIND PRESIDENT BUSH. END COMMENT.

BARNES

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